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TITHES
ANTICHRISTIAN

AND

IMPOLITIC.

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TITHES

ANTICHRISTIAN AND IMPOLITIC.

THE Scriptures inform us that “the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” * We then who live under the Christian dispensation, are not subject to the ceremonial rites of the law, they being all of them fulfilled in Christ, “who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” — “for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” † — “by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Seeing then we are not redeemed “with corruptible things, as silver and gold, nor by the blood of bulls and of goats, which were shadows of good things to come”, Tithes,

* John i. 17. † Heb. x. 14.

which were set apart for the ministration thereof, became also annulled in the Divine law. And therefore, the primitive Christians received them not, nor laid any claim to them; but, according to the command of their Lord and Master,* they freely ministered unto the people the doctrines of life and salvation, which they had freely received. "I have "coveted," said the apostle Paul, "no man's silver "or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, "that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and unto them that were with me. I have "shewed you all things; how that so labouring, "ye ought to support the weak, and to remember "the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is "more blessed to give than to receive." This he addressed unto a people amongst whom he had faithfully laboured by the space of three years, night and day with tears; charging those whom the Holy Ghost had made overseers, to feed the church of God; and warning all to watch and remember his labour of love, knowing that after his departure others would appear among them, very differently disposed, not sparing the flock.†

* Mat. x. 8.

† Acts xx.

Although contributions were often made in the primitive churches for the relief of the poor, it doth not appear that any thing was raised for the support of ministers, as such. Tertullian saith, 'Whatsoever we have in the treasury of our churches, is not raised by taxation, as though we put men to ransom their religion; but every man once a month, or when it pleaseth himself, bestoweth what he thinks good; and that which is given is not bestowed in vanity, but in relieving the poor, and upon children destitute of parents, and maintenance of aged and feeble persons, men wrecked by sea, and such as are condemned to the metal mines, banished into islands, or cast into prison, professing the true God and Christian faith.' Origen saith, 'It is not lawful for any minister to possess lands given to the church, to his own use;' and further, 'It behoveth us to be faithful in disposing of the rents of the church, that we ourselves devour not those things which belong to the widow and the poor: and let us be content with simple diet and necessary apparel.' And Prosper, another of the ancients, told the ministers of his time, 'that those who had of their

‘ own, and yet desired to have somewhat given them, ‘ did not receive it without great sin.’ Thus the church remained free from this abuse for several centuries.

The Council of Antioch, held Anno 340, finding that much fault had been amongst the deacons, ordained that the bishops might distribute the goods of the church, but required that they took no part to themselves, or to the use of the priests, unless necessity justly required it; using the words of the apostle, “ Having food and raiment, be therewith “ content.”

Before the commencement of the fifth century, the professors of Christianity appear to have been further degenerated from the integrity of their forefathers; for the people were much pressed to bountiful contributions for holy uses; and the example of the Jews in giving Tithes, was held up for imitation. Augustine tells them, ‘ that not paying ‘ Tithes, they shall be guilty at God’s tribunal of ‘ the death of all the poor that perish through want, ‘ in the places where they dwell;’ and bids them that would either get reward, or desire the pardon of their sins, to pay their Tithes. And the popes,

who about this time began to usurp universal authority, admonished the people to pay Tithes, not only of their goods but time also, saying, ' we are ' commanded in the law to give the tenth of all ' things to God.' From the influence of these, who like the foolish Galatians were turned again to the weak and beggarly elements, Tithes came to be introduced and to prevail amongst Christians; yet, notwithstanding the doctrine and hard threats of the popes and bishops, it was long before these exactions were established. But as their power and the number of their dependents increased, they gained ground, by little and little, under plausible pretences; and, about the year 800, Tithes were given by many people; one-fourth being allotted to the priest, one-fourth to the poor, and the remainder to the bishop, and for building and repairing places for worship. None however were compelled to give them, nor was it considered as a duty of general obligation till about the year 1200, when the darkness of the apostacy appears to have been at its height, and the popes and their clergy to have arrived at the summit of their antichristian power; when even kings became subject to them,

and enforced these avaricious demands. But history is clear, that gross was the superstition, ignorance and idolatry, manifest in the characters of those kings; and abominable the murders, injustice and wickedness, which they endeavoured thus to expiate: an instance of which may be seen in the preamble to king Stephen's Grant, viz. 'Because
 ' through the providence of Divine mercy, we
 ' know it to be so ordered, and by the churches
 ' publishing it far and near every body hath heard,
 ' that by the distribution of alms persons may be
 ' absolved from the bands of sin and acquire the
 ' rewards of heavenly joys; I, Stephen, by the
 ' grace of God king of England, being willing to
 ' have part with them who by a happy kind of
 ' trading exchange heavenly things for earthly, and
 ' smitten with the love of God, and for the salvation
 ' of my own soul, and the souls of my father and
 ' mother, and all my forefathers and ancestors, &c.
 ' do confirm Tithes.' And yet it was always understood, that the poor were to be maintained out of these donations, and divers laws were made to secure them for that purpose.

Tithes being thus introduced, ecclesiastical courts

were set up for the punishment of those who refused the payment of them ; and, the people implicitly conforming to popery, little opposition appeared to them in England, till the Reformation prevailed and spread over these dominions ; when many of the first reformers declared Tithes to be unlawful amongst Christians, and that they were become a support of Antichrist : for which, and other things, they deeply suffered, and by their zeal and uprightness in the cause of Truth many of the corruptions introduced were measurably done away. But lamentable it was that others, though they parted with some of the idolatrous forms of the Romish church, yet retained much of the old leaven, not only bringing Tithes, with other popish institutions, into the reformed church, but engrossing them wholly to themselves, to the exclusion of the poor for whom they were at first principally given ; in which state they still continue.

This short sketch of the history of Tithes, gathered from the Bible, English history, Seldon's History of Tithes, Pearson's Great Case of Tithes, Ellwood's Foundation of Tithes shaken, &c. clearly proves, that Tithes in Christendom first took place

in the time of the apostacy ; and if there was no history to inform us, that it was in a time of great ignorance and superstition amongst the people, and of craft and hypocrisy amongst the priestly orders, this antichristian custom alone is sufficient to manifest it. For, apart from religious considerations, it is full fraught with temporal evils, being a grievous burthen upon the community, and a discouragement to agriculture ; the farmer in many instances neglecting to improve and crop his inferior lands, because the tenth of the product of his labour and expences, which is often more than his profit, would be taken from him. From this compelled neglect of the possible improvement of the land, the publick sustains great loss, which in times of scarcity is deeply felt by the poor ; inso-much that it would be wise in the legislature to give a bounty, rather than lay such an oppressive tax, on tillage. But besides this, as there is no general regular mode for levying these demands, custom is considered as law ; and this multiplies contention and litigation, not merely by brother going to law with brother, but what is worse, the pastor going to law with those of whose souls he

professes to have the cure ; distressing or ruining those whom it should seem rather to be his duty to feed and protect.

Some of these say, ‘ we only claim our property ; ‘ Tithes are our freehold.’ But this appears only an assertion. The possessors of land a thousand years ago, might give away their land or any thing else they were possessed of ; but a man cannot give what he hath not ; nor could they grant a good title to the labour and skill, on the product of which Tithes are now exacted : for land in itself is tithe-free,—if nothing be produced and severed from it, no Tithe is demandable. Nor doth it mend the matter to call them wages ; for wages can be due only from those who hire, and receive the service performed ; which ~~many~~ many of whom Tithes are exacted do, in ~~any~~ respect whatever.

Much more might be said on this head, but it doth not appear to be necessary, as the general plea for Tithes now is, that they are allowed by the laws of the land ; particularly that of king Henry VIII. in whose reign the first statute law for the payment of Tithes was passed in England, and some since

which seem to be founded thereon. But laws should be for the conservation of property, which can only be justly obtained by gift of the owner, by purchase, or by lineal descent. King Henry VIII. supposed, as the preamble of the act sets forth, that 'Tithes and oblations were due unto God and holy church;' and as such ordered that they should be paid: but as the claim of Tithes on that ground is now abandoned (it being a mere relic of popery), the reason of the law in that respect ceases.

Some assert that when land is purchased or rented, allowance is made for Tithes, and that therefore the occupier has no right to them. But though small allowances may sometimes be made, they seem not to be different from those where lands are open to trespass, which surely do not give a property in them to the trespasser. Whatever is not morally right, cannot be made so by usage, though enforced by power.

These things are common topics of complaint, but were we as quick in discerning the baneful effects of this evil in a religious as in a political sense, we might see that the introduction of Tithes

into the Christian church, has been extremely prejudicial to it. 'The primitive promulgators of the gospel, coveting no man's silver or gold, exercised their gifts under the constraining influence of Divine love, and their labours were accordingly attended with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, whereby many were converted and led into holiness of life and conversation, which is the essence of Christianity; but when in after ages their professed followers looked for outward gain, and entertained avaricious views, then it was that, Judas-like, they betrayed the glorious cause they pretended to espouse, a spiritual darkness over the churches ensued, and it came to pass as foretold by the Apostle, that false teachers would be among them, who privily should bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction; and that many should follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of Truth would be evil spoken of, "and through covetousness (said he) shall they, with feigned words, make merchandise of you."* How literally has this been ful-

* 2 Peter, ii.

filled ! How hath Christ, who purchased redemption for us, and who invites all to come unto him and receive it freely, been denied even by professed Christians ! and how has his holy highway been departed from ! that simple way wherein it is said, " The wayfaring-man, though a fool (as to the " wisdom of this world) shall not err." * It was to be called the way of holiness ; but many of these false teachers taught, that the broad sinful way would lead to life, provided indulgences for sin, and absolution from it, were but purchased at their hands. Thus multitudes following their pernicious ways, through their wicked and hypocritical conduct the way of Truth has indeed been evil spoken of. With fraud and deceit, and feigned words, they made merchandise of the people, dealing in the souls of men. When a man was near his end, they told him if he gave his substance to the church (a name they prostituted to their love of gain), he should certainly be saved, for they would pray his soul out of purgatory. Accordingly such being willing, in the solemn hour when death was approaching, to give up earthly things

* Isaiah xxxv. 8.

which they no longer needed for the sake of heavenly joys, yielded to the avaricious fraud. Such abominable deceit can hardly be mentioned without abhorrence: yet these were the means by which the apostatized church obtained most of its wealth, and doubtless would have gained ground in England still further, if it had not been checked by the act of Mortmain, which renders all such donations void unless made a full year before the death of the donor. Well might the ancient reformers say, that the endowment of churches was an evil thing, seeing so many, for the sake of these emoluments, presume to take on themselves the name of ministers of Christ.

But it is an undeniable truth, that a name doth not constitute the reality, nor forms and shadows create substance. If, as the Apostle taught, he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, nor that circumcision which is only outward in the flesh; and he only is a Jew which is one inwardly, whose circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, and whose praise, or approbation, is not of men but of God; how much more should

this doctrine apply to a Christian, and especially to a Christian minister.

Divine love was Peter's qualification, when he received his commission to feed the flock of Christ; but when, for such a commission, human ordination is substituted, and the motive for accepting it is outward gain, it is to be feared that many, through oppression and greediness of filthy lucre, are like the sons of Eli, who caused the people to abhor the offerings of the Lord, and are enemies of him whom they profess to serve.

It may be asked, who would be ministers without a fixed maintenance? I answer, those whom the Lord of the harvest qualifies, and sends forth by his constraining love and power. Such are made willing to spend and be spent for the good of others; and such only can be true ministers, whom the Lord accompanies and blesses in their labours, for without his blessing the labour of man is vain. To guard his disciples against a presumptuous self-sufficiency, he told them, "that without him they "could do nothing."* And therefore the business

* John xv. 5.

of a minister of the gospel is not to detain those among whom he labours in a dependence on himself, but to point them to Christ; to testify through the Divine anointing what God has done for his soul, and to magnify that Divine arm by which he hath himself been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; to invite and draw their attention to the Divine light and law written in the heart, and to encourage all to seek the Lord for themselves, that in feeling after him they may find him; for in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* It was the Apostle's testimony, and continues to be verified in the experience of many in this day, that "The
 " grace of God which bringeth salvation, and hath
 " appeared unto all men, teaches us, that denying
 " ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live so-
 " berly, righteously and godly in this present world,
 " looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious
 " appearing of the great God, and our Saviour
 " Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he
 " might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify
 " unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good

* 2 Col. iii.

“works.” * But this is the mistake of the generality even of those who profess themselves followers of Christ, they are running after the “Lo here is Christ,” and the “Lo there is Christ,” and depending on the systems and opinions of men, instead of the immediate instruction and government of his Spirit in themselves: wherefore they hunger and thirst after words more than after righteousness; and of such it may be said, their eye is not satisfied with seeing nor their ear with hearing; “But blessed,” said Christ, “are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” † And surely he who hath promised is able to perform, and to furnish those who singly depend upon him with all things needful, seeing he is with them “always, even to the end of the world.”

It is not expected that every reader will presently assent to these truths. The days are not yet ended, wherein, as the apostle foretold, ‡ some would not endure sound doctrine, but after their own desire would heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and turn from the Truth, unto fables. And

* Titus, ii. 11, 12, 13, 14. † Mat. v. 6. ‡ 2 Tim. iv.

truly it is lamentable, that mankind should not only be led by thousands and tens of thousands to wallow in the filthiness of sin, but that so many high professors of the Christian name should suffer themselves to be beguiled into a counterfeit religion, and detained in the forms of godliness from its saving power; compassing themselves about with the sparks of the fire which they have kindled. For, alas! what is all we can do in our own wills, ways and time, but self-righteousness opposed to the righteousness of God; who, as he is truly known and submitted to, "worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

If we do not pass on from all human devices, to the revelation of Christ, the everlasting rock and foundation of Truth, we shall neither understand his sayings nor be enabled to do them. Creaturely wisdom and strength are not equal to the work of our redemption; in the time of trial they will assuredly fail; and, agreeably to the doctrine of Christ, † great will be the ruin of those who trust in or build upon them. From a full conviction of this, some believe it to be their incumbent duty,

* Phillip. ii. 13.

† Luke vi. 49.

to refuse an active compliance with all demands, for the support of those who traffic in such delusions.

The seat of religion is the conscience, and it is the sole prerogative of the Almighty to rule and reign there: therefore, no man hath a right to force another in that which he is conscientiously restrained from, any more than Nebuchadnezzar had to command all men to worship the golden image which he had set up. Could human laws bind the consciences of men, or set them free from the law of God in the mind, then the many pious martyrs and sufferers for conscience-sake in the various ages of the world were mistaken; and on such ground might every legal persecution be justified,—yea even that of our blessed Lord and Saviour himself, for his crucifiers had a law to their purpose; but this did not prevent their being denominated his murderers.

Some say, the dignity of religion must be supported, the ministers of it must have large incomes to raise them above contempt, and they must not be engaged in secular employments, that they may be devoted to the duties of their office; but who

will assert that true religious dignity was not quite as conspicuous in the character of the apostles, who laboured with their own hands for their necessities, recommending their fellow-believers both by example and precept to provide things honest in the sight of all men, as it is in the conduct and manners of those of their pretended successors, who vie with the princes of the earth in their distinctions of honour, and are not ashamed to live in a state of idleness on the labours of others, as lords over the heritage of God ?

This arrogance brings religion into contempt with many who, concluding it to be an artful fabrication of its ministers for worldly ends, run from it into infidelity and licentiousness ; so that it may justly be said now as formerly, “ The leaders of “ the people cause them to err, and they that are “ (thus) led of them are destroyed.” *

Let none say these are ill-natured remarks, for they are not so meant. I am convinced that many are led into these things from custom and the prejudices of education, and are therefore to be ten-

* Isaiah ix. 16.

derly regarded. My desire is, that all may seek the Truth, and cleave to it whatever sacrifice it may call for; knowing the time hastens on every child of mortality, when it will be manifest, that they only are truly wise who "buy the Truth and sell "it not." *

* Prov. xxiii.

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